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# **CDC Health Advisory**

Distributed via Health Alert Network

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## **Giant African Land Snails: Pests Not Pets**

Recent media reports have noted that giant African land snails (*Achatina spp*), also referred to as GALS, have become pets in the United States. These snails are major agricultural pests and could pose a public health threat if infected with the parasite *Angiostrongylus cantonensis*, the rat lung worm.

These snails, which can be larger than a person's hand, reproduce rapidly and have ravenous appetites for agricultural crops. Importation is illegal. For more information, including what to do if you own any of these snails, go to the [United States Department of Agriculture \(USDA\)'s Animal and Plant Infection Service website](#) . A toll-free number will be posted early next week so that people who have these snails can arrange without penalty to have them removed from their premises. USDA does not recommend that people dispose of them.

### **Human health risk is low**

The human health risk, specifically for infection with *A. cantonensis* associated with giant African land snails, in the continental United States, is probably low. This type of snail is one of many types that can be infected with this parasite. It is unknown if any of the giant African land snails in the continental United States are infected. The only way snails can become infected is by eating infected rat stool. The likelihood a snail is infected if at all is considerably lower if the snail was bred indoors and kept in a tank than if it was collected from the outdoors or ever been outdoors.

Even if the snail is infected, the infection can be spread to humans only under unusual circumstances. People get infected by eating raw or undercooked snails or slugs (or freshwater prawns, crabs, or frogs). Whether the slime shed by infected snails can contain parasite larvae and infect people is unknown (e.g., if the slime is shed on a person's hand and then gets into the person's mouth or nose, or if the slime gets on produce that is eaten). People who handle snails of uncertain origin should wear gloves and thoroughly wash their hands.

### **Clinical summary**

In infected people, symptoms, if any, typically develop several days to weeks after the exposure. They may last for weeks to months, while the body's immune system reacts to dying parasites (people are "dead-end hosts" for the parasite).

The following are key points:

- *A. cantonensis* is the most common infectious cause of eosinophilic meningitis;
- paresthesias and hyperesthesias are more often associated with this than with other types of meningitis;

- eosinophilia is not always present the first time peripheral blood and cerebrospinal fluid (CSF) are examined;
- the diagnosis usually is not confirmed parasitologically (i.e., the parasite usually is not found in CSF) but may be supported by serologic data (i.e., an antibody response to the parasite);
- treatment, if needed, usually is directed at symptoms (e.g., pain medication, therapeutic lumbar punctures, and glucocorticoid therapy to decrease headaches) rather than at the parasite (antiparasitic drugs could increase the inflammatory reaction to dying parasites, but they may be beneficial for some patients); and
- patients typically fully recover.

### **Additional information**

Technical information about *A. cantonensis*, including a schematic showing the life cycle of the parasite: <http://www.dpd.cdc.gov/dpdx/HTML/angiostrongyliasis.htm>

Public information on *A. cantonensis*:

[http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/angiostrongylus/factsht\\_angiostrongylus.htm](http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/dpd/parasites/angiostrongylus/factsht_angiostrongylus.htm)

USDA Web site on Giant African Land Snails:

<http://www.aphis.usda.gov/lpa/issues/gals/gals.html>

### **DHEC Contact Information for Reportable Diseases and Reporting Requirements**

Reporting of cases with clinical symptoms and epidemiological association with possible exposure to GALS is consistent with South Carolina Law requiring the reporting of diseases and conditions to your state or local public health department. (State Law # 44-29-10 and Regulation # 61-20) as per the DHEC 2004 List of Reportable Conditions available at:

<http://www.scdhec.net/hs/diseasecont/disease.htm>.

The following is a complete listing of both local and state numbers for use in reporting **ANY** disease or condition.

Federal HIPAA legislation allows disclosure of protected health information, without consent of the individual, to public health authorities to collect and receive such information for the purpose of preventing or controlling disease. (HIPAA 45 CFR §164.512)

## District Public Health Offices

Mail or call reports to the District Epidemiology/Disease Reports office in each district.

### Appalachia I

(Anderson, Oconee)  
220 McGee Road  
Anderson, SC 29625  
Phone: (864) 231-1966  
Fax: (864) 260-5623  
Nights / Weekends: 1-866-298-4442

### Appalachia II

(Greenville, Pickens)  
PO Box 2507  
200 University Ridge  
Greenville, SC 29602-2507  
Phone: (864) 282-4139  
Fax: (864) 282-4373  
Nights / Weekends: (864) 460-5355 or  
1-800-993-1186

### Appalachia III

(Cherokee, Spartanburg, Union)  
PO Box 4217  
151 E. Wood Street  
Spartanburg, SC 29305-4217  
Phone: (864) 596-2227 ext. 210  
Fax: (864) 596-3443  
Nights / Weekends: (864) 809-3825

### Catawba

(Chester, Lancaster, York)  
PO Box 817  
1833 Pageland Highway  
Lancaster, SC 29721  
Phone: (803) 283-3175  
Fax: (803) 283-0572  
Nights / Weekends: 1-866-867-3886 or  
1-888-739-0748

### Edisto Savannah

(Aiken, Allendale, Barnwell)  
1680 Richland Avenue, W. Suite 40  
Aiken, SC 29801  
Phone: (803) 642-1618  
Fax: (803) 642-1619  
Nights / Weekends: (803) 827-8668 or  
1-800-614-1519

### Edisto Savannah

(Bamberg, Calhoun, Orangeburg)  
PO Box 1126  
1550 Carolina Avenue  
Orangeburg, SC 29116  
Phone: (803) 533-7199  
Fax: (803) 536-9118  
Nights / Weekends: (803) 954-8513

### Low Country

(Beaufort, Colleton, Hampton, Jasper)  
1407 King Street  
Beaufort, SC 29902  
Phone: (843) 525-7603  
Fax: (843) 525-7621  
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-712-6586

### Palmetto

(Fairfield, Lexington, Newberry, Richland)  
2000 Hampton Street  
Columbia, SC 29204  
Phone: (803) 576-2749  
Fax: (803) 576-2993  
Nights / Weekends: (803) 304-4252

### Pee Dee

(Chesterfield, Darlington, Dillon,  
Florence, Marlboro, Marion)  
145 E. Cheves Street  
Florence, SC 29506  
Phone: (843) 661-4830  
Fax: (843) 661-4859  
Nights / Weekends: (843) 660-8145

### Trident

(Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester)  
4050 Bridge View Drive, Suite 600  
N. Charleston, SC 29405  
Phone: (843) 746-3832  
Fax: (843) 746-3851  
Nights / Weekends: (843) 219-8470

### Upper Savannah

(Abbeville, Edgefield, Greenwood,  
Laurens, McCormick, Saluda)  
PO Box 3227  
1736 S. Main Street  
Greenwood, SC 29646  
Phone: 1-888-218-5475  
Fax: (864) 942-3690  
Nights / Weekends: 1-800-420-1915

### Waccamaw

(Georgetown, Horry, Williamsburg)  
2830 Oak Street  
Conway, SC 29526-4560  
Phone: (843) 365-3126  
Fax: (843) 365-3153  
Nights / Weekends: (843) 381-6710

### Wateree

(Clarendon, Kershaw, Lee, Sumter)  
PO Box 1628  
105 North Magnolia Street  
Sumter, SC 29150  
Phone: (803) 773-5511  
Fax: (803) 773-6366  
Nights / Weekends: 1-877-831-4647

### Bureau of Disease Control

Acute Disease Epidemiology Division  
1751 Calhoun Street  
Box 101106  
Columbia, SC  
Phone: (803) 898-0861  
Fax: (803) 898-0897  
Nights / Weekends: 1-888-847-0902

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## Categories of Health Alert messages:

**Health Alert:** conveys the highest level of importance; warrants immediate action or attention.

**Health Advisory:** provides important information for a specific incident or situation; may not require immediate action.

**Health Update:** provides updated information regarding an incident or situation; unlikely to require immediate action.